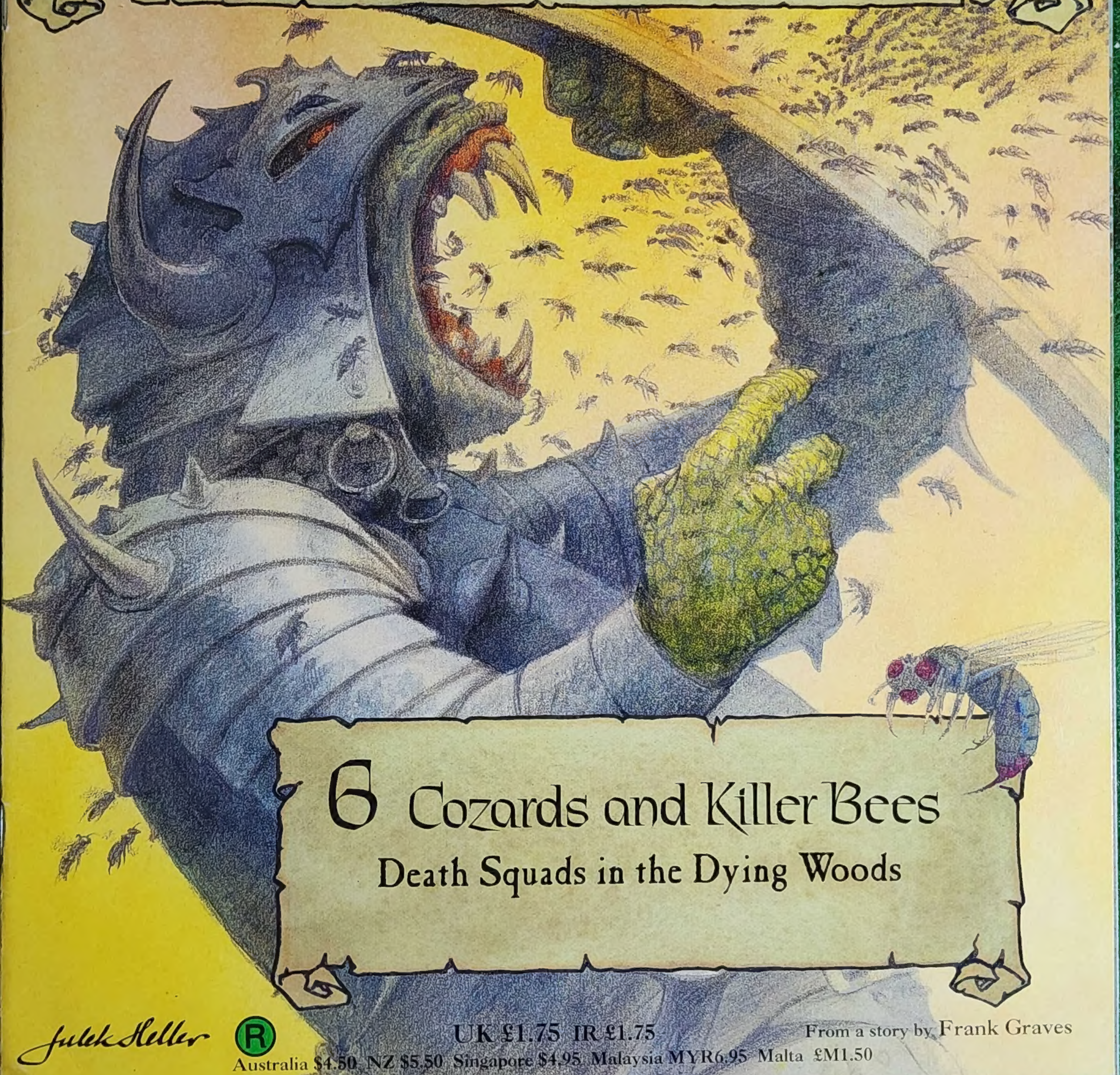
A MARSHALL CAVENDISH COLLECTION 6 IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS



6 Cozards and Killer Bees

Death Squads in the Dying Woods

Julek Heller ®

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From a story by Frank Graves

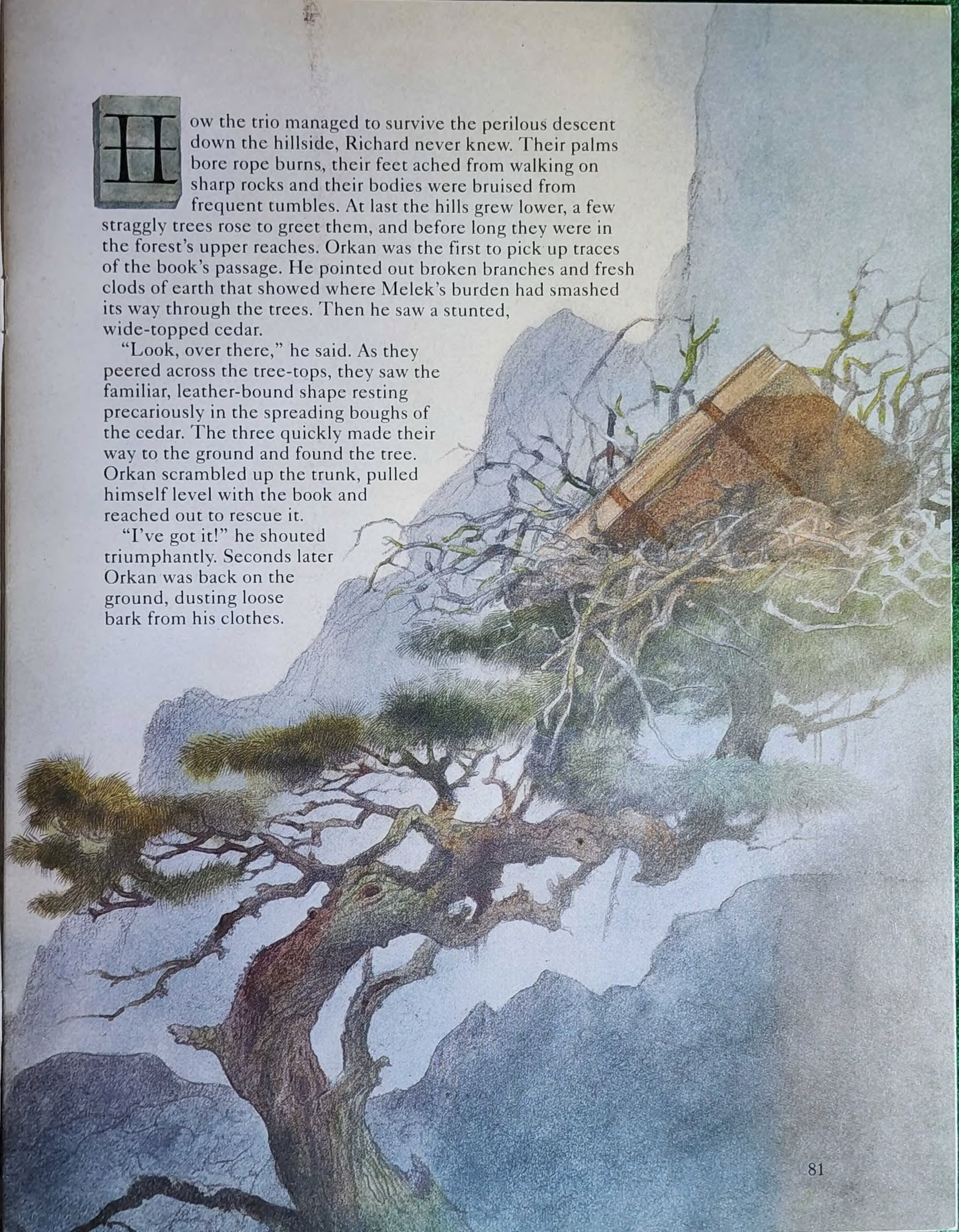
On the Sixth Day . . .

Marching, flying – death at hand?
The brave must fear them both.
Hark the words in ruined land
Of wise and ancient growth.
Wings that weapons cannot quell
Will catch them unaware.
Chosen's choice of touch will tell
And lead them safe to open air.

How the trio managed to survive the perilous descent down the hillside, Richard never knew. Their palms bore rope burns, their feet ached from walking on sharp rocks and their bodies were bruised from frequent tumbles. At last the hills grew lower, a few straggly trees rose to greet them, and before long they were in the forest's upper reaches. Orkan was the first to pick up traces of the book's passage. He pointed out broken branches and fresh clods of earth that showed where Melek's burden had smashed its way through the trees. Then he saw a stunted, wide-topped cedar.

"Look, over there," he said. As they peered across the tree-tops, they saw the familiar, leather-bound shape resting precariously in the spreading boughs of the cedar. The three quickly made their way to the ground and found the tree. Orkan scrambled up the trunk, pulled himself level with the book and reached out to rescue it.

"I've got it!" he shouted triumphantly. Seconds later Orkan was back on the ground, dusting loose bark from his clothes.



"We'd better check the prophecy before we move on," Richard said, as Melek and Orkan checked the straps that had held the book.

Melek read from the rustling pages as Richard and Orkan listened.

"I don't like the sound of death at hand and ruined land," Richard said when Melek had finished. "Still, it says we'll be safe in the end."

The three companions stumbled on towards the valley bottom. A gentle rustling quivered through the trees. Then the sound took on a definite beat, and they heard marching feet and brisk shouts coming towards them.

Evil stormtroopers

"Cozards!" Orkan said nervously. "It's for real this time. We must hide, quickly." His eyes lit on a wide crack at the base of a dying tree. "There! In that hollow trunk."

They crammed into the narrow space and watched as the Cozards thundered past. "The Evil One's search-and-destroy units will kill anyone they come across. They're disciplined, mindless and completely ruthless," Orkan whispered.

The Cozards were short and squat. Heavy armour clanked on their bodies, and from every joint there projected sharp metal spikes. They were armed with axes and barbed spears. The only vulnerable points seemed to be their faces, where steel helmets opened to reveal razor-sharp teeth, squab noses and deep-set eyes.

Behind the formation, an officer bellowed harsh commands.

Richard let out a sigh of relief when the last Cozard stamped past their hiding place. For a while they listened as the shouts and tramp of marching feet receded into the distance. Then, when Orkan deemed it safe, they emerged into the open forest.

Touch of evil

The going was much easier now. The trio were backtracking on the path that the Cozards had smashed through the undergrowth. Before long, however, the trees and bushes around them were either dead or dying. Once-green foliage was now shrivelled. Tree trunks were white as bones.

"This is Green Man Wood," Orkan said, "and this is what the Evil One has done. This is how he'd like the whole land to be – either dead or in his power."

The trio trudged on, snapping lifeless twigs underfoot and pushing through silvery branches. When they reached the remnants of a clearing, the three stopped, resting against a huge oak that still struggled pitifully for life. Once it must

have been among the tallest trees in the forest. Now it was a half-dead shell, doomed to extinction.

As Richard rested against the tree he felt something on his shoulder. Too exhausted to turn around, he shrugged it off as a branch rubbing against his back. Then Richard felt pressure on his arm. He looked round at Melek and Orkan, but overcome by tiredness, his companions had closed their eyes.

WARNING IN THE WOOD

Suddenly, Richard felt a solid grip on his arms. Looking sideways, he could see some of the tree's roots holding him in a deathly grasp. Blind terror filled his heart. They had walked straight into one of the Evil One's traps. Then Richard heard a deep rumbling voice.

"Don't worry," the voice boomed from within the tree. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Richard's heart raced in panic. Was he imagining this? He looked at his companions. They had opened

their eyes and were looking round for the source of the voice.

The roots fell away and Richard jumped up. At first glance the tree looked just like any other. Then Richard noticed a face sketched in lines of withered bark, concealed among natural bumps and creases in the wood. The craggy face looked kind and friendly. Richard remembered the prophecy – 'Hark the words in ruined land of wise and ancient growth'.

"I must pass on a warning," the tree said. "I am the only survivor here. The rest of my family have fallen to the Evil One, and I have little time left myself. A few days at most. I know you are the Chosen One and you must heed my advice," the voice gasped for breath. "Watch out for the Cozards."

"We've seen them already," Richard said with an air of confidence.

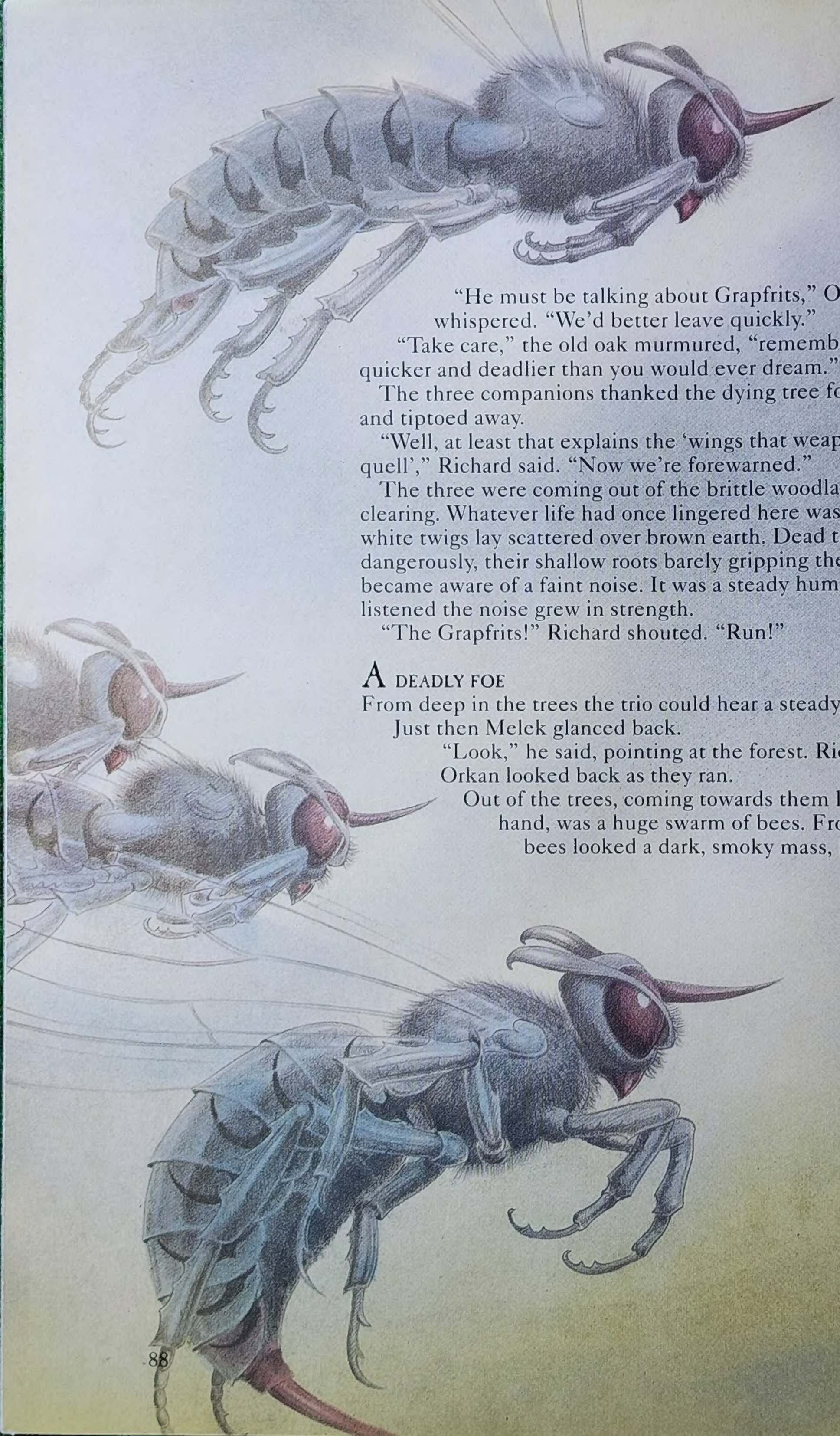
On the alert

"Be on your guard always," the oak went on. "There are eyes and ears everywhere now. Enemy flying squads are on the look-out for anything that moves."

"Grapfrits!" Orkan said. "We've dealt with them before."

"No, no," the tree's voice sounded even weaker. "Others that are dangerous, with deadly stings."

The companions could hardly hear a word now. Orkan shook his head and motioned for them to leave.



"He must be talking about Grapfrits," Orkan whispered. "We'd better leave quickly."

"Take care," the old oak murmured, "remember, they are quicker and deadlier than you would ever dream."

The three companions thanked the dying tree for its warning and tiptoed away.

"Well, at least that explains the 'wings that weapons cannot quell'," Richard said. "Now we're forewarned."

The three were coming out of the brittle woodland into a clearing. Whatever life had once lingered here was gone. Sharp white twigs lay scattered over brown earth. Dead trees lurched dangerously, their shallow roots barely gripping the soil. Richard became aware of a faint noise. It was a steady hum, and as he listened the noise grew in strength.

"The Grapfrits!" Richard shouted. "Run!"

A DEADLY FOE

From deep in the trees the trio could hear a steady, lazy drone.

Just then Melek glanced back.

"Look," he said, pointing at the forest. Richard and Orkan looked back as they ran.

Out of the trees, coming towards them like a black hand, was a huge swarm of bees. From afar, the bees looked a dark, smoky mass, but already the

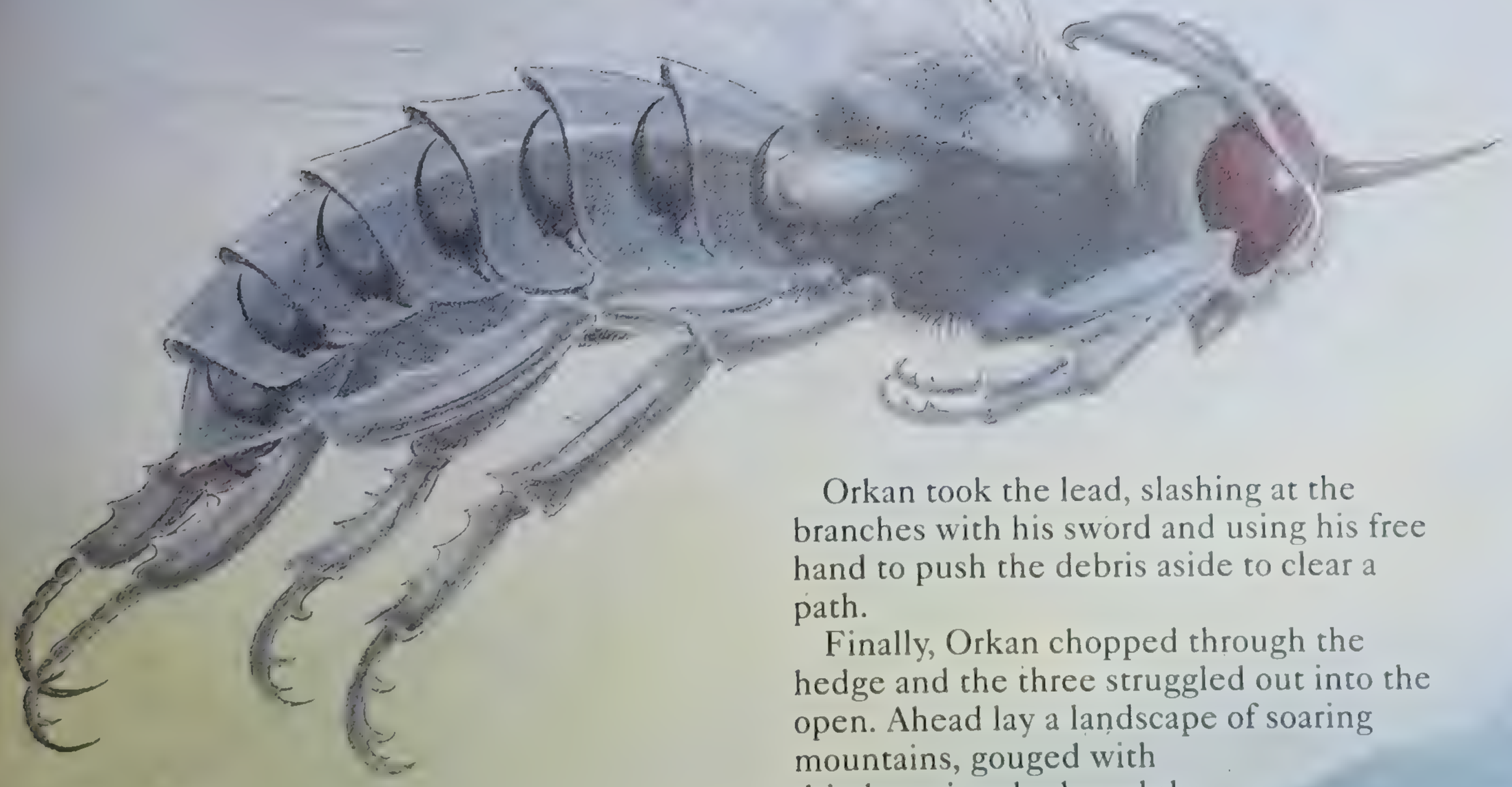
first scouts were edging nearer. Even from a distance, Richard could see that they looked more like huge hornets than bees.

Racing for cover

The bees' narrow bodies were marked with the pointed horn of the Evil One's mask. Some bees were armed with gigantic stings, ready for action. The drone had reached a note of shrill fury.

"Killer bees. They are what the tree was warning us about," Orkan cried.

Even as he spoke, there loomed in front of them a high wall of branches – the corpse of a thick thorn hedge that ran off to either side without break.



Orkan took the lead, slashing at the branches with his sword and using his free hand to push the debris aside to clear a path.

Finally, Orkan chopped through the hedge and the three struggled out into the open. Ahead lay a landscape of soaring mountains, gouged with dried-up river beds and the scars of recent landslips.

Orkan led his two

companions up along the course of a dried-up stream, whose flat terraces formed a natural staircase. They were scrambling up a giant step when vicious bellowing echoed up the rockface. The Cozards had returned.

The three sprang like goats up the dry stream. Higher and higher they scrambled until the stream-bed petered out. Richard stared ahead and saw Golan's features above a narrow gap in the rockface. He pointed out the gap to the others.

At that moment they heard the grinding of boots on rocks. A lone Cozard was approaching them.

Orkan turned to Richard. "I'll hold him up," he said. "You two get inside."

As Melek and Richard scrambled into the rocky crevice, Orkan took out his sword. Then a whistling sound rent the air and a barbed spear landed beside him.

Deadly duel

Orkan jumped sideways just in time but found himself face to face with the Cozard. The stormtrooper's mouth was curled back in an awful grin as he swung his heavy axe.

Watching from the gap in the rockface, Richard and Melek's eyes widened in horror. As the Cozard's blade glanced Orkan's cheek, he jerked his head back and lost his balance for a split second. At that moment, the Cozard flung himself upon Orkan, and raised his weapon. His

eyes were staring wildly into Orkan's. Then to Richard's and Melek's surprise, the stormtrooper lifted a hand to his neck and stumbled.

Orkan squirmed free and jumped to his feet. His sword cut through the air and struck the Cozard with such force that the sword flew from Orkan's hand. The Cozard plunged backwards off the rocky slope. Stopping only to pick up his sword, Orkan ran back to join his companions.

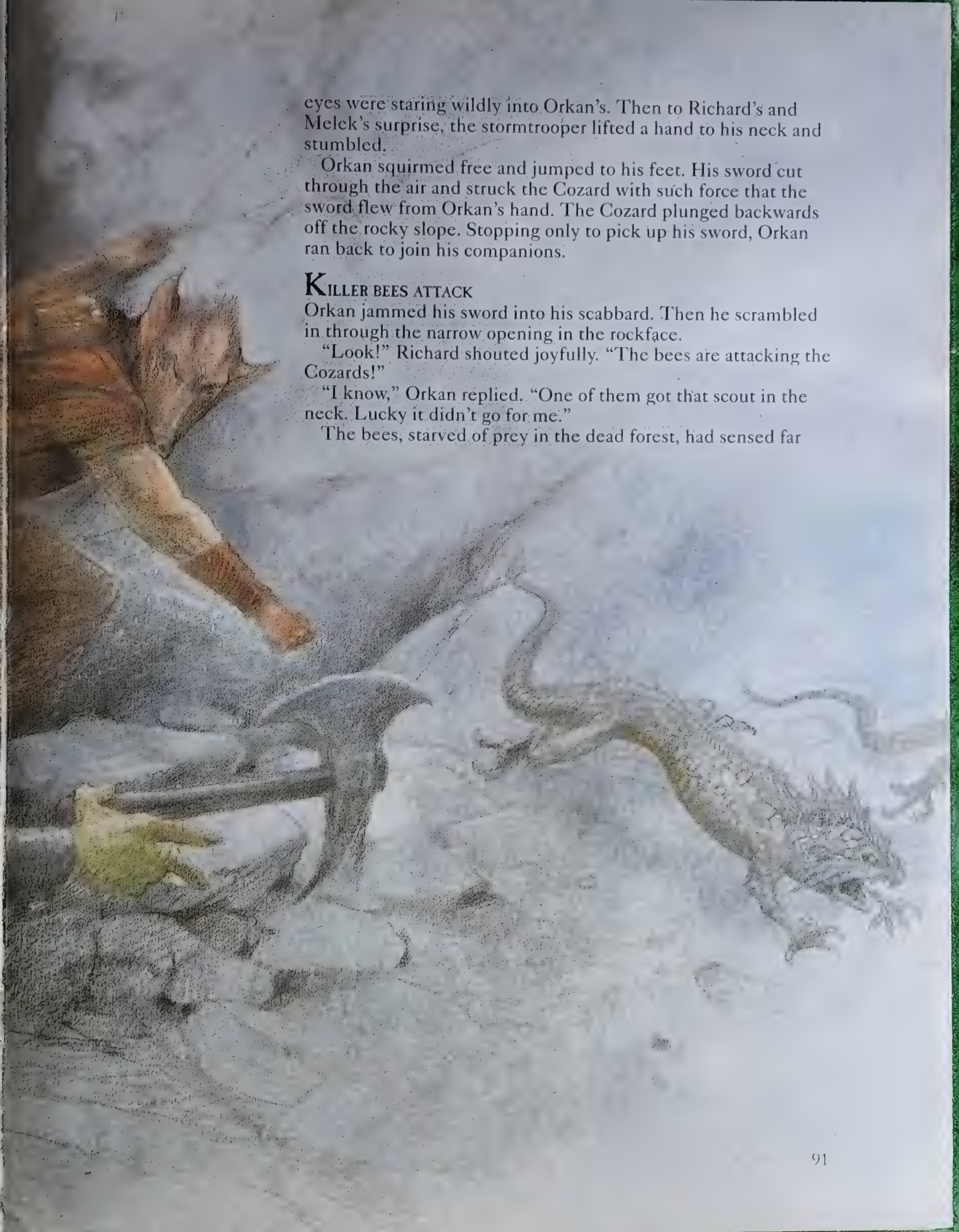
Killer bees attack

Orkan jammed his sword into his scabbard. Then he scrambled in through the narrow opening in the rockface.

"Look!" Richard shouted joyfully. "The bees are attacking the Cozards!"

"I know," Orkan replied. "One of them got that scout in the neck. Lucky it didn't go for me."

The bees, starved of prey in the dead forest, had sensed far



richer pickings from the band of newcomers than from the three small specimens they had previously targeted. It did not matter to them that the Cozards were covered in armour. Their stings could penetrate the tightest joints. The fact that the Cozards were in the Evil One's service did not seem to matter to the bees – evil has no scruples.

The swarm bunched into a tight fist, raised itself slightly in the air, then fell like thunder on its new foe.

Wall of steel

Richard was amazed at the Cozards' speed. The outer ranks dropped to their knees and raised their shields vertically, while the innermost troops crouched likewise and hoisted their shields flat above their heads. The move was performed with total precision in one violent clash of steel, transforming what had once been a squad of soldiers into a solid metal box against which the bees burst in confusion.

The tortoise-shaped box could not hold forever against opponents as determined as the bees. The swarm surged like water against the Cozard formation, squirming its way through the weakest points.

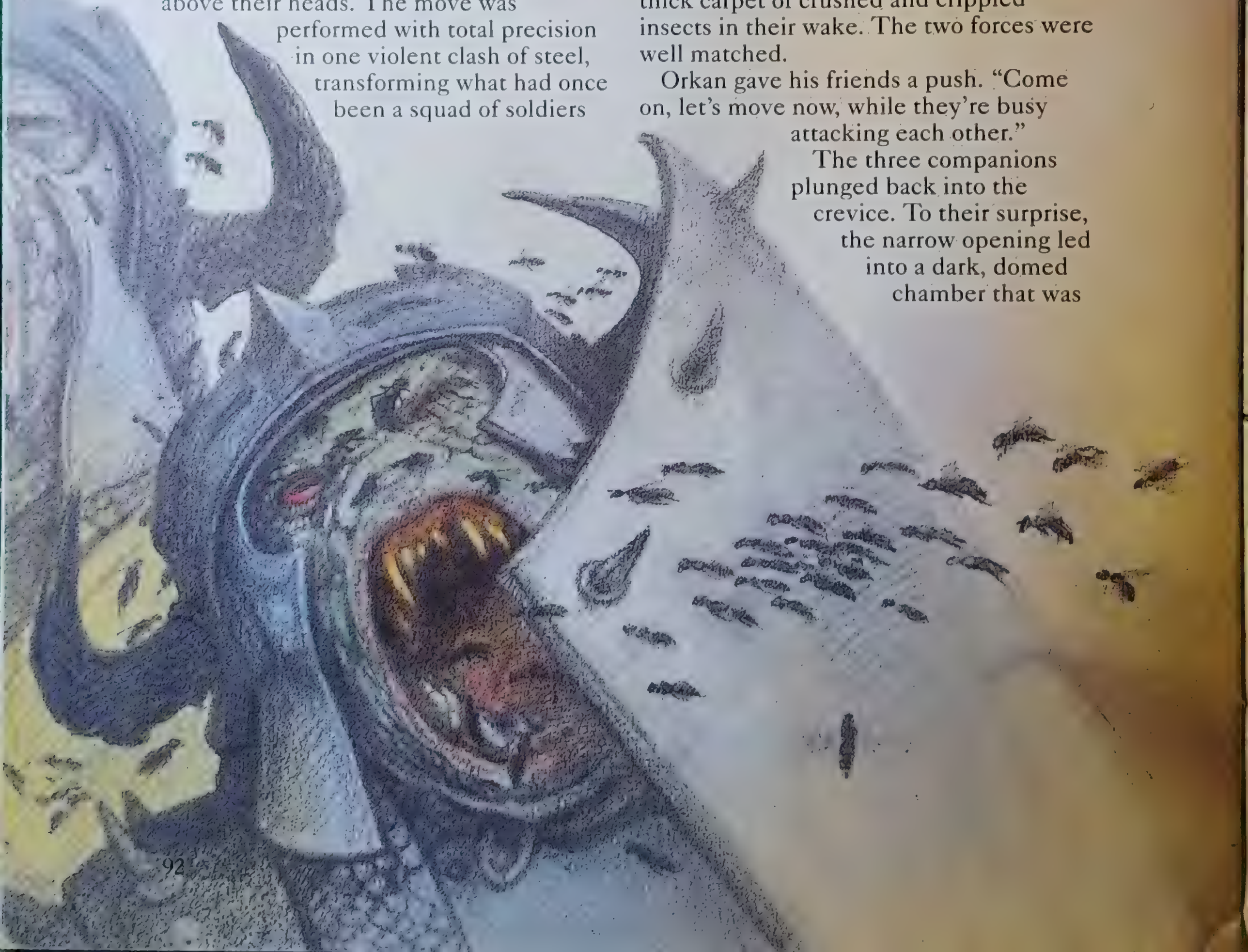
Broken defences

One by one, gaps appeared in the shield wall as individual Cozards broke screaming into the open, ripping off their helmets and trying to crush the creatures that crawled over their faces.

The Cozards kept their discipline. For every shield-bearer who broke and ran, another took his place, the squad forming again in an ever tighter square. Amazingly, the Cozards were advancing, leaving a thick carpet of crushed and crippled insects in their wake. The two forces were well matched.

Orkan gave his friends a push. "Come on, let's move now, while they're busy attacking each other."

The three companions plunged back into the crevice. To their surprise, the narrow opening led into a dark, domed chamber that was



easily tall enough for them to stand in. The floor was covered in sand, and the wall had been undercut at waist level by long-gone floods. In the faint light, they could make out a dark hole set just above the waterline.

Richard wondered what lay in store now. He fingered Golan's amulet and once again he had the comforting feeling that the Guardian's presence was with him. He felt sure they should go in.

Into the tunnel

"Come on, we'll go down there!" Richard commanded. Without hesitation, he heaved himself over the tunnel's rocky sill. After a moment's pause, Orkan and Melek followed Richard.

They found themselves in a dreary passage, barely shoulder-height, that ran off into blackness. Rubbing over their

heads and shoulders were fronds of slimy vegetation. The three ran blindly down the stone corridor, hunching themselves to avoid the low-set roof. In their wake, came a fearful rumble.

Buried alive

For a moment, Richard thought it might be the Cozards behind them. Then a more terrible truth penetrated his mind. It was a rockfall. They were about to be buried alive.

The sound grew to an overwhelming crash. As the roof caved in on their heads, they were flung to the floor. For a moment Richard choked on clouds of dust. Then he lost consciousness.

The rocks crushed Richard's limbs together. As he came round, he could feel their weight press against his chest, making breathing almost impossible. A gentle rumble signalled that yet more of the roof was falling in.

End of the quest?

There was no way out. Richard was trapped for eternity. His quest had come to an inglorious end, buried beneath a mass of rubble, deep in the heart of a mountain.

As he struggled out of semi-consciousness Richard realized that he was not trapped under fallen rocks, but sitting upright in a dimly-lit cave. The pressure on his chest came not from stones but from thick ropes that bound him tightly to a massive stalagmite.

Approaching voices

Out of the corner of his eye, Richard could see Orkan strapped to the same pillar. The rumble he had heard resolved itself into gravel-throated, strangely accented voices that came from deep within the cave.

Richard's senses also picked up something new – a sour smell that was vaguely familiar. He was trying to place it when the voices came nearer.

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

Look out for these friendly creatures again.

In issue 5, Shoomi and Shoobi appeared on page 80.

Mask of Evil

A fragment of mask and several faces are hidden in this issue. Can you find them in less than three minutes?

In issue 5, the fragments of mask were on pages 73 and 78.

Monsters and Magic

Read about the Green Knight and the Green Man on Morbane's cards. Which story do you think the speaking oak in this issue is based on?

In issue 5, Boltor was based on the Lightning Bird.

Life Force Pod

Did you spot the clue on page 72 of issue 5? Richard noticed how tough he was getting – he had found the Pod of Endurance.

The Ancestral Trail

Cut out the tokens and locator cards and keep them safe. Details about the role-playing game and how to play it will appear in future issues.

Advanced Pod Quest

A game for two or more players using your **Monster Might** cards and a dice.

How to Play

1 Shuffle cards and place face down.
2 First player to turn over an Evil suit is Evil. He takes the Evil cards and Pod card. The other player is Good and takes remaining Good cards.
3 Evil holds up cards, without showing monsters. Good points to an Evil card which Evil brings to the top of his set – still without naming monster – to defend the Pod.

If Opponent points to Pod card, he takes it and points to another Evil card to take up the challenge and recapture the Pod.

4 Good chooses his own character to battle for the Pod and brings it to top of set then rolls the dice to decide a category for combat:

6 = Good/Evil 5 = Size 4 = Strength
3 = Magic 2 = Trickery 1 = Weapons

5 Evil names monster chosen to defend Pod and reveals power rating in the category rolled.
6 The player with the lower rating loses the challenge, his character is vanquished and the card placed face down.
7 The player with the higher rating points to a new card in Opponent's set to take up the challenge for the Pod.
8 The battle continues until one player is left without any cards. To win, a player must hold the Pod and at least one character to defend it.

The defender may roll the dice for an omen:
Even number = Good omen and adds 2 to score
Odd number = Bad omen and takes 2 off score

Rules: The same category cannot be called twice in succession • The Pod may change hands several times – or not at all • If either force is left holding only the Pod, that force loses.

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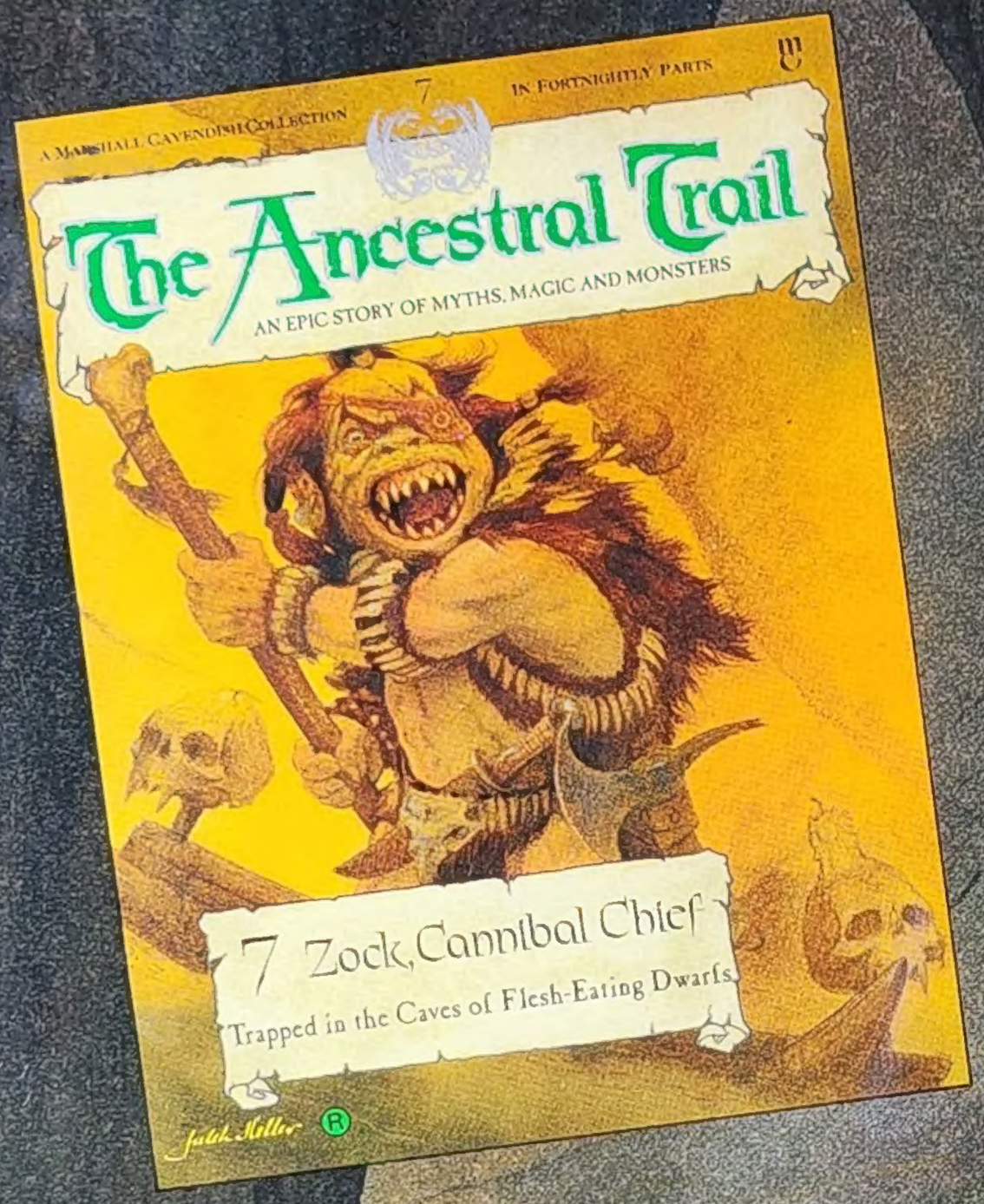
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Trapped in the Caves of Flesh-Eating Dwarfs
Judith Miller

In Issue 7

Zock, Cannibal Chief

Our friends fall into the hands of greedy cannibal dwarfs and are being held deep in the caves of Kanbala. Are they destined for the pot?

plus

- Morbane writes about Baba Yaga, an ogress who builds her home on top of a chicken leg, and tells us about a boy who turned the tables on a cannibal.
- More pieces to add to your Ancestral World puzzle map.

Coming in Issue 8

Enlil's Dungeon

Enlil keeps a precious pod in the heart of an underground volcano. Will the three companions manage to snatch it and escape the beasts that defend it?

plus

Morbane's stories – A giant who breathes fire and a vicious dog that guards the gates of hell • More tokens and locator cards.

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